

Assessing the Cultural Impact of the Equal Distribution Policy (EDIP) on iTaukei: A Blessing or a Curse?

[https://doi.org/10.33318/jpacs.2023.43\(1\)-4](https://doi.org/10.33318/jpacs.2023.43(1)-4)

*Sevanaia Sakai*¹

Abstract

The iTaukei, or Indigenous people of Fiji, own 91 per cent of the land and makeup 57 per cent of the country's multiracial population. Although critical in development discourses, these figures do not appear to translate into the development outcomes for the biggest landowners in the country. As it is, the 2019-2020 Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) revealed that 75 per cent of those living below the Basic Needs Poverty Line were iTaukei, the highest of all the ethnic groups living in Fiji (Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2021). This statistic challenges the previous government's rhetoric: 'We are leaving no one behind.' In 2010, the Bainimarama government amended the Leases and Licenses Regulations of the Native Land Act (1961) to ensure equal distribution of lease money to members of landowning units (LOUs) who lease their lands. There were claims of social, economic, and cultural benefits made by the Bainimarama government that were endorsed by the iTaukei Native Land Trust Board (TLTB) to validate the amendments. This article critically examines the government's claims concerning EDIP to protect customary practices. The discussions are based on empirical evidence from a case study that examines the implications of land law literacy on village governance, political affiliations and the well-being of iTaukei in Narewa, western Viti Levu.

Keywords: Customary Land; Equal Distribution; iTaukei; Land Reforms; TLTB

¹School of Law and Social Sciences, The University of the South Pacific, Laucala Campus, Suva, Fiji, email: sevanaia.sakai@usp.ac.fj